IDENTITIES IN ACTION. A NEXUS ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND LANGUAGE SHIFT

ABSTRACT

This article investigates language shift and identity construction in two Finnic-speaking communities: Lappe in Ontario, Canada and Bugøynes in Northern Norway by asking how the people of these two communities perceive themselves while their minority language is in the process of disappearing. Identity construction through visual and linguistic means are analysed and compared. In both communities, people speak similar minority languages, observe similar traditions, and have Finnish items in their homes, but these actions do not carry the same symbolic value. In Lappe these items and traditions have been allocated social meaning; they are explicitly referred to as ‘Finn’, whereas similar items and traditions do not carry any overt symbolic value in Bugøynes. This symbolic value, or lack thereof, is not a direct result of the items and traditions themselves; rather they mediate social action (Scollon and Scollon 2004). An analysis of the social actions and the way these actions take part in identity construction reveals that it is not the traditions and items in themselves that carry symbolic value, but rather the actions that precede or accompany them.

KEY WORDS

Identity construction, nexus analysis, material objects, language shift

INTRODUCTION

This article looks at identity construction in two communities undergoing language shift addressing the following questions: When the minority language is in the process of disappearing, what other means do people have for the construction and negotiation of identities? Can the construction of social identities be related to large scale discourses? The

Focus of the analysis is on the role of language and material objects and how the symbolic meaning of the latter is realised through social action.

Issues related to identity are central to discourse analytic research, and the relationship between language and identity is frequently addressed. We often take for granted that language is essential to identity, and therefore a study of identity construction in a situation of language shift can shed more light on this issue.

Lappe, a small rural community in Ontario was founded by Finns in the 1870s. The natural surroundings look like Finland: forests, lakes, some farmland, and lakeside summer cottages with saunas by small piers leading into the lake as depicted in Figure 1. For someone with knowledge of Finnish culture a glance at this picture suffices to identify this as a Finnish sauna. The same goes for many of the objects in peoples’ homes in Lappe, such as the Marimekko serviette in Figure 2.

[Figure 1 and 2 here]

In Lappe, these items and also these visual images immediately are recognised as Finnish, and embedded in this recognition are questions related to identity construction and language shift. These items are associated with Finnish identity, and in many Finnish homes such objects are visibly prominent because they are placed in display cabinets, on bookshelves and on the living room coffee tables.

In a Finnish-origin community in another part of the world the situation is very different. In Bugøynes in Northern Norway the population also is of Finnish descent, the community is undergoing language shift, and in their homes we find very similar objects as we do in Lappe. But whereas in Lappe, these objects are foregrounded and the visual presentation is enough to signal Finnish identity, this is not the case in Bugøynes. Even though most homes have Finnish items and everybody has a sauna, this is seen as a part of every day life and not allocated any overt or identity-symbolic meaning.
Both these communities are undergoing language shift, and therefore the use of these items could be analysed as a way of using other means than language to express identity. Interestingly, even though the inhabitants of both villages say that language is important to them, only in one of the communities identity is expressed through visual means. The question addressed in this article is the role of visual and linguistic means for the expression and negotiation of identity and the impact of minority language policies on the development of an identity other than the national identity.

The article begins with a brief outline of questions brought to the fore in research on identity in multilingual contexts followed by a presentation of nexus analysis, the theoretical framework used for the analysis. Then some background information of the two communities is given, particularly with respect to language policies. In order to analyse the role of visual means for identity construction I will compare to what extent Finnish items are allocated meaning through action. This analysis will be supplemented with linguistic data. Finally, I will suggest that this cross-methodological analysis is a fruitful contribution to the study of identity construction in multilingual settings.

IDENTITY – BROUGHT ALONG OR BROUGHT ABOUT?

During the past decades there has been an increasing number of questions relating to identity, and earlier approaches in this field were dominated by an essentialist view of identity where identity was seen as constituted of essential or core categories (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, and Liebhart 1999). This essentialist view of identity has also been evident in sociolinguistic research, particularly in the variationist paradigm where patterns of language use has often been analysed as merely reflecting an identity or macro-level social factor, such as social class, gender, sex, age, etc. (Auer 2005). In more recent years there has been a shift from the mere focus on the self to a group or collective identity, as for example in national, ethnic/cultural,
class and gender identities, and identities of communities of practice (e.g. Wenger, 1998, Wodak et al. 1999, Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). Also, the focus has shifted from seeing language as merely expressing identity to seeing identity and language as mutually constitutive (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). The social constructionist approach to identity rejects essential or core categories as defining the collective’s members. Thus identities are not perceived as fixed and stable, but rather as multiple, fluid and dynamic, and seen as both shaping and being shaped by cultural expressions. In other words, identity is not only something we have, but also something we create, mould and change through action. Joseph (2004:90) points out that for both methodological and theoretical reasons the notion of ‘essentialism’ should not be totally rejected: when adopting an entirely constructivist view of categories, one risks losing analytical rigour. He also mentions that by constructing an identity one is in fact constructing an essence. In other words, identity is something one has, but also something one does or constructs.

In discussions of ethnic minority groups, there has been a tendency to regard a ‘we-code’ and a ‘they-code’ as defining the minority and the majority culture respectively. This is particularly evident in some research on code-switching where each language is equated with an identity or association with a group and code-switching itself is regarded as a signal of identification with a group (Poplack 1980, Myers-Scotton 1993). Others, like Auer (2005) and Li Wei (2005), focus on how bilinguals negotiate identities in conversation in the same manner as monolinguals do, the difference being that bilinguals have more codes in their repertoire. Therefore, identity is not analysed as something that is brought along with the various codes, but jointly constructed in conversation (Li Wei 2005).

In research on bilingual identity the most prominent focus has been on linguistic aspects such as code-switching. However, bilinguals have other means than code-switching for identity construction, though in research on bilingualism other semiotic tools are often
overlooked and analysing language as an isolated object. However, language is a part of our social semiotic system, and should not be analysed in isolation from other semiotic means. Therefore, this article will look at various ways in which identity is constructed and negotiated, both by non-linguistic and linguistic means.

NEXUS ANALYSIS

This article presents a nexus analysis of identity construction in a process of language shift. Nexus analysis is the methodological strategy of mediated discourse analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004) which draws on several linguistic and anthropological fields: ethnography of communication, linguistic anthropology and critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to Scollon and Scollon (2002:1) the aim of mediated discourse analysis is to address the relationship between discourse and social action: “Mediated Discourse Analysis is a form of sociocultural analysis that seeks to clarify the many complex relations between discourse and social action”. Within mediated discourse analysis all actions are understood to be mediated by cultural tools (or mediational means). Mediational means are semiotic tools ranging from language to material objects. Social action, or mediated action, is seen as any action performed by a social actor through the use of cultural tools.

Nexus analysis is a form of CDA, but in contrast to a lot of research within the CDA framework which focuses on large scale social discourses, the starting point for a nexus analysis is always on the micro level: a social action produced by a social actor at a given moment in time and space (Scollon and Scollon 2004).

A recurring challenge for most sociolinguistic research is to bridge the micro-macro level gap by answering the question of how we can provide support that there is a connection between an action on the micro-level and large-scale social factors. One can identify actions ranging from phonological variables to language attitudes on the one hand and potential
‘causes’ on the macro-level, but the task is to identify possible connections. CDA has sometimes been criticised for focussing solely on power structures and large macro-level discourses. Nexus analysis shifts the focus from these large scale discourses to concrete actions performed, and thus, nexus analysis broadens the scope of discourse analysis. Jones and Norris (2005:4) give the following account of the relationship between discourse and the social world:

Mediated discourse analysis was developed as an alternative to approaches to discourse that see social action as secondary, and approaches to social analysis that see discourse as secondary (R. Scollon, 2001a). By not privileging discourse or social action, but, rather seeing discourse as one of many available tools with which people take action, either along with discourse or separate from it, MDA strives to preserve the complexity of social situations. It provides a way of understanding how all of the objects and all of the language and all of the actions taken with these various mediational means intersect at a nexus of multiple social practices and the trajectories of multiple histories and storylines that reproduce social identities and social groups.

The starting point of a nexus analysis is social actions on the micro-level. Through this analysis the researcher attempts to identify and understand the various factors influencing a social action and then to map the relevant discourses that circle through the moment when the action occurs. Larger social issues are seen as grounded in these actions, and “the most mundane of micro-actions are the nexus through which the largest cycles of social organization and activity circulate” Scollon and Scollon (2004:8).

Nexus analysis is an historical ethnographic study of action by which the researcher asks how this action could come about and what potential consequences it could have. Thus, both the methodological point of departure and theoretical frame of reference is social action.
Scollon and Scollon frequently use the term *mediated action* because they see all social actions as carried out by mediational means or cultural tools. All action is seen as inherently social and mediated because the action is communicated or mediated through symbolic or material tools (Scollon and Scollon 2004).

When a social action is taken repeatedly, it is considered a *social practice*, which can be understood as an accumulation of social actions, and the following definition of practice is given by Scollon (2001a:146):

A practice is a historical accumulation within the habitus/historical bodies of the social actor of mediated actions taken over his or her life (experience) and which are recognizable to other social actors as ‘the same’ social action. A practice predates the social actor; that is, we mostly learn the practices of our society, rarely initiate them.

A 'social actor' is not an abstract label for the person performing the action but refers to a specific person. In most cases, a practice predates the moment in which the social actor engages in that practice, but as new practices arise, there will be practices that do not precede the social actor. New practices can often arise out of the actions of a social actor when these actions are mutually construed as practices within a nexus of practice.

Social practices, both discursive and non-discursive, get linked up over time to form a nexus of practice (Scollon and Scollon 2004). As outlined above, the point of departure of a nexus analysis is the identification of a social issue, and the primary focus is on a social or mediated action or the point in time and space where a particular social issue is manifested in action. This is not a list of taxonomies or a traditional ethnographic description of a speech community, rather the researcher seeks to understand the various factors influencing a social action. It is therefore essential that the researcher becomes involved with the participants of the nexus of practice. By engaging in the nexus of practice she can seek to identify a social issue, find the primary social actors and determine the most significant cycles of discourse.
Scollon and Scollon (2004) refer to this as establishing a ‘zone of identification’, and this is the initial stage of any ethnographic fieldwork (cf. Agar 1996). The researcher strives to achieve an insider’s view by identifying discourses, actions and cultural tools relevant to the participants. Thus, the first task of a nexus analysis is to determine what kinds of data should be gathered and how to gather it. The gathering and the analysis of data are not discrete processes: the researcher analyses (parts of) the data during the process of gathering data, which in turn makes her see what other kinds of data might be useful.

The initial part of a nexus analysis is to map the cycles of people, places, discourses, objects and concepts circulating through this micro-semiotic ecosystem (Scollon and Scollon 2004), and identify some of the relevant social actions. In order to achieve this, the researcher must be recognised by the other participants as part of the nexus of practice. This initial step lays the ground work for the main part of the nexus analysis: navigating the nexus of practice which is when the bulk of data gathering and analysis takes place. Through the engagement in the nexus of practice, the researcher has identified and selected relevant social issues which will be the focus of the analysis, and now the task is to map the relevant cycles circulating through the moment when the social action takes place (Scollon and Scollon 2004:159).

Nexus analysis, like ethnography of communication, takes an inductive approach and starts out with specific observations and moves on to generalisations or ‘the larger picture’ in contrast to deductive reasoning which takes a hypothesis as a starting point and employs observations to strengthen or falsify the initial hypothesis. The hypo-deductive model does not suit most research within the humanities. This is due to the fact that research within this field, though it often has elements of deduction\(^1\), is generally hermeneutic and striving to arrive at a continuously deeper understanding, not at principally falsifiable hypotheses. Nexus analysis is hermeneutic as the analysis of the parts, in this case social actions, helps the

Analyst to understand the large scale discourses which in turn makes us understand the social action better, and this opens up a new dimension for the analysis of the broad picture.

The social issue addressed in this article is the language shift which is well underway both in Bugøynes and in Lappe. More specifically, we may pose the following questions: When the minority language is in the process of disappearing, what other means are there for the construction and negotiation of identities? Can the construction of social identities be related to large scale discourses?

DATA

This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in two research sites: Bugøynes in Northern Norway and Lappe in Ontario, Canada. A variety of methods have been employed to ensure that the object of study has been approached from several angles. The aim is not only to produce more data, but also to analyse the data from several perspectives in order to achieve a more complete understanding, often referred to as triangulation or ‘diversity of method’ (Johnstone 2000), and Scollon and Scollon (2004) emphasise that the use of multiple sources of data always has been the foundation of ethnographic work. The use of different methods makes the interpretation of the data more reliable, but this does not make the conclusions drawn on the basis of these data falsifiable in a positivist sense. What it can do is make the researchers more familiar with the data and aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis, and thus it gives the researcher an interpretative understanding. The principal method of my study was participant observation, but I also used other methods such as recording of everyday conversations, sociolinguistic interviews and feedback sessions. I also photographed buildings and objects in people’s homes and cottages and asked some of the people I met to take photographs.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Both Bugøynes and Lappe were founded by people of Finnish descent. Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809. During the last part of the century, a policy of Russification was imposed on Finland, and Finland lost most of its relative independent position as an autonomous Grand Duchy. However, the main reasons for Finnish emigration were not political, but economical. At this time in Finland the economy went through a process of industrialisation; the population increased, land and jobs were scarce, and in addition there were crop failures. Therefore, people left Finland to look for a better life elsewhere. The North Calotte had been characterised by migration for centuries, but the emigration to Canada was a modern phenomenon.

Bugøynes

Large parts of Northern Norway are bi – or trilingual, and the languages in contact are Norwegian, Saami and Finnish. The Arctic areas have been multilingual for centuries, and people have made seasonal travels between the inland and the coast for fishing, trading etc. From the beginning of the 17th century, people from the Northern parts of Finland settled along the coast of Northern Norway; some of them settled before the final national frontiers were drawn. This group of people and their descendants are called Kven. The Kven established Bugøynes around 1840, and today, Bugøynes is a small tightly knit community with about 200 inhabitants, and those over the age of 60 generally speak Kven.

Lappe

The settlement of Lappe was more gradual than in Bugøynes, lasting from about 1890 until 1930, and then a new wave arrived in the 50s and 60s. Lappe is close to Thunder Bay which used to be the largest Finnish-speaking settlement outside Finland. The Finns were regarded
as a valuable contribution to the Canadian society; they were literate and they had skills which were needed in the Canadian nation building process (forestry and agriculture). Lappe was founded by Finns, and even today the majority is of Finnish descent. In Lappe and the surrounding areas there are about 1000 inhabitants, and many commute to Thunder Bay. The youngest Finnish-speakers in Lappe are in their 50s, but very few use the Finnish language on an everyday basis.

MINORITY LANGUAGE POLICIES IN NORWAY AND CANADA

The idea of Norway as a nation state arose during the period of national romanticism, influenced by German nationalism: The nation was defined in terms of ethnicity, and language was the outward sign of ethnicity; thus, language became the defining criterion of the nation. The idea of ‘one nation – one language’ was a key element in this process, and in the period from 1840-1940, the official political goal was to ‘Norwegianise’ the minorities in the north (Eriksen and Niemi 1981).

Both the Kven and Saami minorities went through a period of substantial linguistic oppression, often referred to as the Norwegianisation process. They were not allowed to use their languages at school, and in extreme cases children were beaten if they used their mother tongue. Speaking Kven was a great shame, so they tried to speak Norwegian as best they could, but their Norwegian was not “proper” Norwegian. Thus they were in a position of double shame: Their mother tongue was worthless, and they could only try to replace it with a foreign language they did not master. The Norwegian authorities implemented a range of actions and laws to ensure a Norwegian cultural environment. The rights to this area had been disputed earlier: inhabitants paid taxes to three nations until 1826: Norway, Sweden and Russia, and Norway feared that Finland-Russia would lay claims on the North. The school was one of the key elements in this Norwegianisation process. The use of Kven was forbidden.
in the schools, and boarding schools where the use of Kven and Saami was strictly forbidden were established to ensure a Norwegian environment. Many Kven children received their education at these schools, removed from their families and their mother tongue. Thus, the focus of the minorities was not on their culture and mother tongue but rather on becoming Norwegian.

The situation of the Canadian Finns was different. In Canada there had been a longstanding tolerance towards the literate European-origin immigrants which provided a more favourable society for the Finns in Canada compared to the Kven in Norway. The Finnish immigrants to Canada were seen as an asset in building the Canadian nation, whereas the Kven were a border minority. Therefore the policies aimed at them were influenced by national security issues. It seems that the Canadian authorities were too concerned with the tension between English and French to pay much attention to the other European-origin groups. The basic attitude seemed to be that if the immigrants managed to communicate well enough to be a valuable contribution to the workforce, knowledge of English and French was subordinate (Lane 2006).

In Canada the role of the school seems to have been particularly different from the role of the Norwegian school in the Kven areas. The children had to learn to read and write English, but they were allowed to speak Finnish, and even some of the teachers were Finnish-speaking (Lane 2006). Lappe is also close to Thunder Bay where there was a Finnish co-operative, Finnish dentist, doctors and lawyers, Finnish churches, Finnish shops, a Finnish restaurant, a Finnish club, Finnish churches, a variety of Finnish organisations and a Finnish newspaper. Morrison (1979) described the Finns as the “aristocracy of the foreign-born”. Thus, the Finns were allowed to maintain their language and culture and find their place in the Canadian mosaic.

**LANGUAGE SHIFT IN LAPPE AND BUGØYNES**

In both these communities there is an ongoing language shift; the population is in the process of shifting to the majority language. In Lappe the language shift follows the pattern which has been described in other studies of language shift, amongst others Gal (1979). The shift is gradual: the majority of those who were born in Canada and grew up speaking Finnish with their parents, siblings and friends now use English for almost all their social interactions except when they meet ‘Finns from Finland’. In Bugøynes, on the other hand, the language shift has been abrupt, probably as a result of the Norwegianisation process. In the early 1960s everybody stopped speaking Kven to the children. Somebody said that encountering the Norwegian school without a language was a burden they did not wish to place on their children, and therefore they decided to speak Norwegian only to them. those who are older than 50 speak Kven, whereas the younger ones do not. Those who grew up speaking Kven with each other still speak Kven together, and those who spoke Kven with their parents’ generation still speak Kven with them. Those who were born after 1960 are monolingual Norwegian speakers, even though many have a passive knowledge of Kven.

**IDENTITIES IN ACTION**

I will investigate to which extent cultural tools such as material objects and traditions are used as means for identity construction, and I will suggest that it is not primarily the objects themselves that carry symbolic value, but rather the actions which precede or accompany these objects. The goal is to analyse a social action and the cultural tools used to carry out the action and further to identify the relevant discourses circling through the moment when the action occurs. Material objects may take part in larger semiotic systems. In the two communities investigated in this study material objects have been given different semiotic value and play different roles in the construction of identities.
In Lappe, people of Finnish descent refer to themselves as Finn, whereas the inhabitants of Bugøynes do not use any ethnic term for themselves. The Finns in Lappe used this term (Finn in English and soumalainen in Finnish) for themselves both in the sociolinguistic interviews and in everyday conversations. This is also an out-group label as people of non-Finnish background use the term Finn. Finn is also used as an adjective: one talks about a person as Finn, Finn food, Finn traditions and the language is also called Finn. Because of the strong Finnish influence in the Thunder Bay area, the English spoken has a number of borrowings from Finnish referring to Finn food and traditions, for example: pulla ‘coffee bread’, suolakala ‘cured fish/salmon’, and Johannus ‘Midsummer’s Eve’. Everybody pronounces sauna in Finnish, and several people who were not of Finnish descent underlined that it’s important to say it right.

Just after I had arrived in Lappe for my second fieldwork period I was invited to a cottage by one of the little lakes in the area. In my field notes that evening I described something that I only afterwards realised was typical for ‘being Finn’:

Timo had a Finnish flag at his cottage, on a flagpole by the little pier by the lake, and he said: “isn’t this a great country that lets us be Finn”. Beautiful little cottage, everything is well looked after, with runners on the tables and a towel in the sauna – I think the towels must have been bought in Finland. Timo had folded small, very fine serviettes, and placed them in the handles of the coffee cups like little fans. I commented that it looked so nice, and he said that he had learned it when he was in Finland. He had a photo album with pictures from a holiday trip to Finland and showed them to me.

When I wrote this, I saw Timo’s comment about Canada allowing them to be Finn as the most significant aspect, but there is something else here which was repeated time and time again when I visited Finns in the area. Their Finnish background was present, not only audibly in their language but also visibly in objects in their homes. When I first noticed this, I found it
interesting, but did not pay much attention to it. After a while, I began to realise that these objects were important, and I started paying attention not only to what people said, but also to the design of their houses and the objects in their homes. I had been ‘blind’ to the visual aspects of their surroundings, but I started paying attention to this because I discovered something that did not fit my preconceived ideas.

Participant observation opens up for the unexpected to occur and provides data the ethnographer could not know would be needed before the fieldwork (Agar 1996). After a few weeks of socialising with people in Lappe, I realised that the role of these Finn objects was far deeper than just an index of the people’s Finnish background. These items were present in almost every single home I visited, and therefore I addressed the role of these objects in the sociolinguistics interviews. During the initial period of the nexus analysis I had come to realise that the Finnish objects were important, but I did not know in what way. The sociolinguistic interviews shed further light on this. Most of the interviews were done with groups of people because I wanted to get their interaction and not just answers to my questions. I addressed the role of these objects by a fairly open question, just asking them if Finns have Finnish items in their homes or have any Finn traditions. Sauna came out on top of the list. They often told stories of the first settlers who built a small sauna first where they could live while the main house was being built, and that children were born in the sauna. The sauna is both a symbol of the past and the belonging to Finland, but it is also an object and a tradition of today. One has a sauna every Saturday and some on Wednesdays as well, and almost everybody has a sauna, usually electric, in their home, and a ‘genuine one’ at camp. One invites friends to the sauna at one’s camp, and there the atmosphere is relaxed and one spends hours chatting in the sauna and in the water. Other Finn traditions were also mentioned: celebrating Christmas Eve and Juhannus (Midsummer’s Day), Pikku Joulu (pre-Christmas party) with rice porridge and some included SuurJuhla or FinnFest, a large summer
gathering for Canadian Finns. Some of the members of the Lappe Lutheran Church also included some Finn religious gatherings. Several people I interviewed also mentioned some interior designs as being Finn: single drape curtains, and extensive use of pale wood. The Finns’ preference for pale wood, simple curtains and Finnish glassware was something many of non-Finnish background pointed out to me as well. The objects mentioned and shown to me cover a wide range from items such as wall hangings, glassware and ceramics to practical items like shovels and rubber boots:

The short excerpt above from my field notes is a very illustrative example of the data I got from engaging in the nexus of practice: Timo says that Canada is a great country because Canada lets them be Finn. This conversation takes place at Timo’s cottage, or camp, as cottages are called in this area. A group of eight Finns who all spoke Finnish and my family were present. The setting is prototypically Finn: we are at the camp by one of the many lakes in the area, we have had a sauna and have been swimming, and now it is time to have coffee and something to eat, including pulla, Finnish coffee bread; the serviettes and cups on the table are Finnish, and Timo is flying the Finnish flag. All the parts of this setting were repeated over and over again in various contexts: at people’s camps, in their homes, during coffee hour after church and at various social functions. In basically every single home I visited, there would be at least one Iittala candle stick on a table or on a bookshelf in the lounge, Marimekko serviettes or other Finnish serviettes on the table, a Finnish woven wall hanging, Finnish glassware in the display cabinet and in many homes there was a small Finnish flag in the kitchen or in the living room. People referred to these objects and they all have a story. Originally, I thought they would have been bought in one of the Finnish stores in Thunder Bay, but it turned out that most of these items had been bought in Finland or were gifts given by friends or relatives in Finland or Canadian Finns who had been in Finland. These items were often accompanied by the story of their origin: where in Finland they had
been acquired, and who had given them as a gift. In many Finn homes, Finnish serviettes were used when the table was laid for a visitor. I first assumed that they were bought in Thunder Bay, until someone showed me a drawer where she keeps her Finnish serviettes, mainly Marimekko, but also other brands. She explained that these serviettes are used for special occasions, and given as part of presents for marriages of birthdays, because if one gives a nice glass bowl or a serving dish a packet of serviettes would accompany this as ‘a touch of Finn’.

As mentioned above, in Lappe a Marimekko serviette and a lakeside sauna or even photos of these objects are enough to evoke connections with Finnishness. In homes Finnish objects such as the shoes made of birch bark in Figure 3 are displayed in living rooms. These shoes were placed on a Finnish woven runner on a display cabinet in the living room.

[Figure 3 here]

One of the key elements of Finnish culture is the sauna, and in Lappe this was frequently pointed out in the interviews. The role of the sauna turned up several times in the conversations where I participated, and also in conversations which were recorded without my presence. Both those of Finnish descent and others stressed the importance of sauna and its central place in Finnish culture.

**Bugøynes**

The contrast between Bugøynes and Lappe is striking. In Lappe people refer to themselves as Finn, they have various Finn dishes, Finnish objects are used and displayed in their homes and they also follow Finnish traditions. The situation in Bugøynes is different. Even though the majority of the inhabitants of Bugøynes are of Finnish descent, they do not use any form of ethnic term to refer to themselves. In both communities, people speak a variant of Finnish which is different from the Finnish spoken in Finland, they code-switch, they observe many
similar traditions, they have many of the same objects in their homes and they eat similar food. In Lappe, all this is referred to as Finn, whereas this does not have any label in Bugøynes. If asked, the people of Bugøynes will say that they are of Finnish descent, but they do not explicitly use any ethnic or cultural term for themselves, still there is a strong feeling of belonging, not to an ethnic or linguistic group, but to the place Bugøynes itself (Lane 2006).

When I first asked if people in Bugøynes have any Finnish items in their homes or observe any Finnish-origin traditions, the answer was no across the board. Then I told them about Lappe and how people there emphasise Finnish items and traditions and asked them if they could see any resemblance to Bugøynes. This made almost all of the 20 I interviewed, and also some I had more informal unrecorded chats with, wonder why Bugøynes is so different. Only then did they realise that there are items and traditions of Finnish origin in Bugøynes, but *men vi tenker jo ikke over det* ‘but we don’t pay any attention to this’.

There are many Finnish items in Bugøynes homes, but in general these have not been acquired because of their Finnish connotation. Most of these objects have been bought when people have crossed the border to Finland to buy meat, beer, petrol and wood, which is considerably cheaper in Finland, and while one is there one picks up a pair of rubber boots, kitchen utensils, a woven rug, mats etc. For people in Bugøynes, the closest place for this kind of shopping is Näätämö in Finland, and since most families got cars in the late 70s, shopping trips across the border have been common. There used to be a store in Kirkenes which sold Pentik ceramics, but it only kept going for a few years and closed down because the turnover was too low. Some people from Bugøynes did buy Finnish items from this shop, but only one person I spoke to told me that she had bought Finnish items because they were Finnish. One of the most intriguing aspects of the interviews in Bugøynes is that I sometimes could see Finnish items while we were chatting, like an Iittala sugar bowl or candlestick, a packet of Finnish serviettes or a packet of Finnish biscuits on the table. Still, when I asked them if they
have Finnish items in their home, they would say ‘no’ in spite of these items being visibly present. They would rather stress that they buy Russian items “because Russia is so close now” or mention that they just picked something up when they crossed the Finnish border to do some shopping. Thus, the Finnish aspect of these items is outweighed by the more pragmatic aspects of buying objects which are close, readily available and reasonably priced, be it ceramics, serviettes or food items.

The following example also highlights the difference in the way sauna is perceived and allocated meaning in Lappe and Bugøynes. I asked Ina and Tom if they follow any Finnish traditions, and there is an eight second pause before Ina whispers nei ka det sku vær ‘no what should that be’, confirmed by Tom who says finsk nei ‘Finnish no’ followed by a five second pause. I then explicitly ask if sauna is Finnish:

**Example 1**

Pia  ka med dampbad (.) e det finsk ?

*what about steam bath is that Finnish*

Ina  æ tenkte æ skulle si sauna men vi e jo vant med sauna hjemmen[ifra]

*I thought I’d say sauna but we are used to sauna from home*

Tom  [det] det kommer jo (.) fra finland (.) det e jo sikkert finsk .

*it comes (.) from Finland (.) so it has to be Finnish*

Ina  sauna ?

*sauna ?*

Tom  ja (.) så den har vi jo (.) sauna det e jo egentlig

*Yeah (.) so that we do have(.) sauna it is [really]*

IIna  [sauna] (.) e jo sånn utebad ute

*sauna is like a outdoor bath outside [she refers to sauna as a separate small building]*

Pia  mhm

Tom:ellers så e det ikke (.) æ æ kan ikke si at [æ]

apart from that there isn’t (.) can’t say that I

Ina: [nei]

Interestingly, Ina says that she had thought of sauna, but that they are used to sauna from home, so sauna cannot be Finnish. This example is illustrative of the interviews from Bugøynes as both Ina and Tom say that they do not have any Finnish objects in their home.

When I asked people in Bugøynes if they observe any Finnish traditions or if there are people in the village who have Finnish items in their homes, nobody gave an affirmative answer, not even sauna was mentioned in spite of the presence of one in every home in Bugøynes. The contrast to the Canadian interviews is striking. In these interviews, 33 of the 34 people I interviewed immediately mentioned several Finnish objects, traditions and dishes, whereas the conversation in the example above is typical for the interviews in Bugøynes.

The role of the sauna is different Bugøynes compared to Lappe. People do not refer to sauna as something Finnish or Kven. The sauna is seen as a place where one relaxes and gets clean. This is evident in the photo of the sauna from Bugøynes (Figure 4) which depicts a bunch of birch branches used in the sauna.

[Figure 4 here]

These birch branches were used in a sauna at a small cottage in the mountains. The traditional way of making these bunches of birch branches is using a thin, supple branch to tie the other branches together, but often one would use a piece of string. The person who made the bunch on this photo has used black plastic tape. This is an object used for practical purposes and not because it is part of any sauna culture or an indication of Finnishness. This illustrates that the object was made for practical purposes as a sauna tool, not for any decorative or symbolic reason.
Bugøynes is situated in a multicultural part of Norway and like the Canadian Finns the inhabitants have had contact with other ethnic groups. Therefore, they have had the opportunity to contrast their traditions and costumes with others, but their focus has been on being Norwegian.

**COMPARISON OF BUGØYNES AND LAPPE**

People of Finnish descent in Bugøynes and in Lappe have similar items in their homes, but these objects do not mediate the same social action. The objects can be seen as frozen actions (Norris 2005) because they are the material results of actions that were taken in the past. In Lappe, these objects are used as mediational means for identity construction, whereas in Bugøynes, they have mainly been acquired for purely practical reasons as these items bought are bought during a shopping trip to Finland because one needs serviettes or a candle stick anyway. In Bugøynes, the Finnish objects tell the story of people who cross the border to buy items they need for practical purposes for their day-to-day life, whereas in Lappe they are used to do construct an identity of Finnishness. This is possible because different discourses circle through the moment of action. Of course, this does not entail that the inhabitants of Bugøynes do not perform acts of identity when they buy Finnish objects in Finland. The difference is that these items are not used to symbolise a Finnish or Kven identity; they are backgrounded as everyday practical items.

In order to arrive at an understanding of what is going on, we have to do what Scollon and Scollon (2004) refer to as opening up the circumference of discourse analysis. A social action takes place at a moment in time and space, and the actor has a life history that this person carries within her/him, and thus our bodies are lifetime accumulations of our actions, memories, and experiences. This is what Scollon and Scollon (2004:13) call the historical body:

Different people play the same role differently depending on their history of personal experience inscribed in what the philosopher Nishida calls the *historical body*. A lifetime of personal habits come to feel so natural that one’s body carries out action seemingly without being told. Bourdieu referred to this phenomenon as *habitus* but we prefer *historical body* because it situates bodily memories more precisely in the individual body.

The concept of historical body also echoes Bourdieu’s concept of *bodily hexis*: “Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*”. (Bourdieu 1977:93-94).

The inhabitants of these two communities carry with them their own experiences and histories and also the stories, attitudes and worlds views passed on by the previous generations.

Various factors influence the construction of Finn identity in Lappe, and therefore one has to investigate the discourse cycles that circle through the moment when the action takes place. In Lappe, people say that they are Finn and they also refer to their role in the Canadian mosaic. In Canada the ideology of the ‘melting pot’ never achieved the same popularity as in the US, and in the 1930s, the ideology of ‘cultural pluralism’ developed and got identified with the catchword ‘mosaic.

Thus, in Lappe the groundwork for Finnish identity is already present, whereas this is not the case in Bugøynes. People in these two areas have been subject to different minority policies The Kven were culturally and linguistically oppressed until the 1960s, whereas this was not the case for the Finnish-speaking population in Canada. For the Kven who lived through this period of oppression these experiences became internalised and influence the individuals’ perception and evaluation of their culture and background and thus it becomes part of their historical bodies. These practices in turn, get passed on to their children and

grandchildren’s generation, either directly by practices that take part in identity construction, or indirectly, by not paying any attention to one’s cultural background.

Scollon and Scollon (2004:164) point out that it is difficult to see ‘invisible’ discourses in an event in the present as these discourses tend to be visible only by mapping discourse cycles backward (or forward) around the arc of their circumference away from the event one is analysing. In the data from Bugøynes there are many indications of transformation, and the references to the Norwegianisation process show how this was internalised and passed on. Today, however, there are indications that this discourse is in the process of being replaced by a realisation that there are other minorities in similar situations, and to some extent an orientation towards the modern Finland. The Kven has also been recognised as a national minority and thus a part of the Norwegian cultural heritage: This might lead to a situation similar to that in Lappe as the people in Bugøynes might start using material objects to construct an identity of Finnishness or being Kven. Serviettes which used to be bought in Finland because they were more reasonably prices there can be acquired because of their Finnishness. Because the cultural landscape is different it is now possible for the people in Bugøynes to do similar identity work to that of the Finns in Lappe. When the contexts changes, this opens up for resemiotization to occur (Iedema 2003:41)

**CONCLUSION**

In this article, aspects of identity construction in Bugøynes and Lappe have been analysed in the light of the different minority language policies. We have seen that even though the people of Finnish descent in these areas speak similar minority languages and have very similar items in their homes, this does not carry the same symbolic value. These items have been allocated social meaning in Lappe; they are explicitly referred to as ‘Finn’, whereas similar items do not carry any overt symbolic value in Bugøynes. This symbolic value, or lack

thereof, is not a direct result of the items themselves; rather they mediate social action (Scollon and Scollon 2004). An analysis of the social actions and the way these actions take part in identity construction reveals that it is not the items in themselves that carry symbolic value, but rather the actions that precede or accompany them, cf. Norris’ (2005) notion of frozen actions. The analysis illustrates how policies on the macro level influence individual choices, and how large scale social discourses figure in the social actions of individuals.

We have also seen that language, at least in the traditional sense, is not necessarily intertwined with identity. When language shift occurs, there are still visual means available for the construction and negotiation of identity.

The comparison of the two communities highlights the importance for multimodal methodology. The analysis of the role of material objects in identity construction brings to the fore aspects that are not easily captured by a tape recorder and traditional linguistic analysis. Conversely, the examination of linguistic data shed light on the visual analysis, and shows how a multi-focal lens can enrich the analysis of semiotic means. Identity construction is a multi-faceted process, and therefore multimodal and inter-disciplinary approaches are essential to address these complex processes.

1 Grammatical analyses often have more of a deductive nature

2 Transcription key

( . ) pause

[ ] overlapping speech

? rising intonation

. falling intonation

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